Constructive Feedback Suggestions

*The following is a long list of tips, but you will not need to follow them all every time! Some are general guidelines; others refer more specifically to formal post interview or appraisal feedback. These are things we already know and do, but it can’t hurt to remind ourselves.*

***Give positive feedback before negative***

Most people respond to praise, encouragement, and recognition. Preface negative feedback with a positive statement, and it is more likely to be favorably received. For example: “I’m very pleased with the way you’ve settled in—you’re really popular with the clients. I do feel, though, that you need to take more care with your paperwork....”

***Encourage***

If you like something about a person, or feel s/he has done something particularly well, recognize this, give positive feedback, encouraging the person to build on strengths.

***Be specific***

Avoid general comments such as “that was good.” Instead say what was good. Try to comment on observable behavior. Avoid commenting on something a person can do nothing about, on their apparent motives or shortcomings.

***Concentrate on what can be changed***

Direct your feedback only toward behavior that an individual can do something about.

***Give details***

Detailed feedback gives more opportunity for learning. For example: “The way you phrased that question was helpful to the client because it gave him the opportunity to explain....”

***Allow the other person to accept or reject your feedback***

You cannot impose beliefs, opinions, and attitudes on others. At best, demands for change are met with initial resistance: at worst, intransigence and feelings of resentment. Skillful feedback offers people information about themselves which they can consider and from which they can learn. Whether or not your feedback is acted upon is a matter for their decision.

***Offer alternatives***

Turn negative feedback into positive suggestions. For example: “It would save time if you collated all the information first, rather than....”

***Describe rather than judge***

If you evaluate, do so by referring to criteria which you saw or heard and the effect it had on you. This will be far more useful than offering value judgments and comments such as “that was awful,” or “that was really great.” For example: “The way you listened to my problem, the way you sat forward; your facial expressions; your obvious concern, made me feel important and valued as a person.”

***Take responsibility for feedback***

Avoid “you are...” statements which suggest unanimous opinions of the other person. Open with “I think...” or “in my opinion.” It is important to take ownership of proffered feedback.

***Leave the recipient with a choice, but try to make him/her aware of the implications of ignoring feedback.***

***Be aware that things may not change as a result of your feedback***

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There is always the chance that the recipient will be annoyed, or hurt by negative feedback, or that your relationship might change as a result. You need to weigh the pros and cons of not offering feedback before proceeding.

***Check that you have been heard and understood correctly***

***Ask whether or not the recipient agrees with your feedback***

Give the other person a chance to think about and discuss the feedback in your presence. S/he is unlikely to act upon feedback with which s/he disagrees.

***Ask recipients if they have ever been given similar feedback before***

If they have, your feedback will reinforce the fact that some kind of change is needed (or if positive feedback, self-confidence will be enhanced by your reinforcement). If they have not, it will at least establish that the issue is between just the two of you.

***Ask recipients to suggest alternative forms of behavior etc.***

The most positive step toward setting a clear objective about change is to enable people first to acknowledge the need for change and, second, to reach their own conclusions about how things could be done differently.

***Ask recipients to specify what they intend to do differently, when they will put it into practice and how they can find out if it has been effective***

***Ask recipients to consider the consequences of not acting upon specific and directive feedback***

This comes in to play only in the direst circumstances. It is sometimes necessary. Of course, careful record keeping is important in these circumstances.